



## The News from Paraguay

By Lily Tuck  
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### Introduction

Winner of the 2004 National Book Award, **The News from Paraguay** is the lush, engaging fictionalization of Paraguay's real-life nineteenth-century dictator Francisco Solano Lopez and his Irish mistress Ella Lynch.

Leaving her beloved Paris, the cultured, ever-curious Ella embraces the powerful love between herself and Franco and everything that comes with it: the hope and promise of a rising country, five sons, an evolving culture, a place in history, a brutal, unwinnable war, devastation, and loss to its inevitable tragic conclusion.

### Questions for Discussion

1. How does the sexuality in the book mirror the story of Franco and Paraguay's development? What are some of the ways in which the romantic love between Ella and Franco reflect the story of Lopez the dictator and his quest to dominate South America? What about the later sexual encounters in the book? In what way do they symbolize the realities of Franco's war and the demise of his authority and country?
2. Even as a mistress, Ella is a powerful and commanding presence in Paraguay's domestic and military affairs. Where does she figure in the pantheon of "the women behind the men?" (Jacqueline Kennedy, Eleanor Roosevelt, Eva Peron.) Are there common qualities that seem to exist in them? If so, what are they? Why are women of powerful men so fascinating? In what ways is she more powerful than Franco?
3. It seems as though Ella loves her mare Mathilde more than Franco, more than any country she may call home, more than her children. What purpose does the horse serve in her life? Is there some tenderness or vulnerability she can only express to an animal? How do the other animals in the book reveal something of their owner?
4. Ella and Franco are both complex people, at turns affectionate and happy, at turns greedy and brutal. What are some examples of Ella and Franco at their best? Their worst? Are they essentially good people?
5. Life is surprisingly tenuous and violent in the wild, undeveloped Paraguay of the 1800s. Ella's baby girl dies of crib death and another baby boy dies after being born premature, the bloody amputation of Marie's arm which results in her death, the self-induced abortion of Dona Dolores, the thousands of deaths in the war, many by starvation and disease, the raping of young Guarani girls that take place in Inocencia's former bed. Did you find the violence in the book shocking, and how does this affect Ella?
6. Ella adapts well to Paris from Ireland, to Paraguay, to new languages, new people. Franco, on the other hand, does not adapt well to change and does not ultimately survive. Why? Discuss why Franco does not alter his plans for the country and the war when things start to go badly.
7. Has Ella's character changed by the time she has returned to Paris and is living in poverty? When she sits in her room and sees the ghosts from her past, is she satisfied with the life she has had or are the visions of people from her past an indication that she is haunted by memories, disturbed by regrets?
8. At the end of his life, has Franco gone crazy or is he merely seeing to the very end his thwarted, insatiable ambition?

### About the Author

Lily Tuck was born in Paris and grew up in Peru and Uruguay. She has written three previous novels: **Interviewing Matisse**, **The Woman Who Walked on Water**, and the 2000 PEN/Faulkner finalist **Siam**. She has also written a collection of short stories called **Limbo, and Other Places I Have Lived**. Her fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker*, the *Paris Review* and the *Antioch Review*. She has three sons and lives in New York City and Maine.